

WILLIAMSTOWN GARDEN CLUB

General membership: Tour of Hildene

Thursday, June 13
Spring Street parking lot, 9 a.m.

MINUTES

- A. WELCOME: President Maria Siskind met 18 members who had gathered in the town parking lot at the bottom of Spring Street shortly before 9:00 am. and explained the plans for the day. Wearing hats and smiles, and carrying water and backpacks and sunscreens, we divided into a few different cars, and headed north. Many of us had never been to Hildene before, and the level of enthusiasm was high.
- B. SPEAKER: Arriving, we were greeted by a staff member and escorted on a walking path from the reception area, a former stable (now turned gift shop and meeting room) up a winding walking path to the mansion, and met with our guide, Andrea Luchini, a horticulturalist who has been working at Hildene for 12 years. Hildene is the estate of Robert Lincoln, the only son of president Abraham Lincoln, who started building on the 412-acre property in 1902 and hired a landscape architect, Frederick Todd, who had interned at the firm that designed Central Park, to help him design a plan for the property. At the time it was mostly cleared farmland. It was completed in 1905. They still have the original blueprint. It's distinguished, Andrea told us, because they were "working with nature herself as a partner and focused on the wise use of natural resources." She explained that Mary Lincoln wanted the formal garden outside her sitting room, at the back of the house, and that in order to create this garden, soil had to be trucked in. She explained the garden's design, which is made to look like a stained glass window, with different colored flowers bordered by privet hedges. The peonies, which Hildene is most known for, were brought in from Paris in 1905. She took us on a walk through the gardens, answered many questions from our members, and demonstrated some of the techniques used by Hildene's four full-time gardeners. After that, we strolled back down the hill, through a garden of native perennials, and into the welcome center to enjoy our bagged lunches in the meeting room. After lunch, we were on our own.
- C. SELF TOUR: Individually and in small groups, we had plenty of time to tour the mansion, explore the many walking paths, hitch a free ride on the golf carts that rolled continuously from one location to another across the large estate and see some of the other highlights, including the perfectly restored 1903 wooden Pullman palace car, which arrived at Hildene in June of 2011, and the goat dairy, which makes award-winning cheese and allows visitors to pet the adorable and friendly Nubian goats. We

had plenty of time to browse in the gift shop and consider the many plants that were potted and marked for sale on the walkway into the welcome center, and several of us brought special plants home. The weather was warm and sunny. The company was warm and sunny. The Williamstown Garden Club paid for our admission tickets.

D. NEXT MEETING: July 9, 2024.

Submitted by Pat Wilk, Recording Secretary